

NRI PULSE NEWS DESK

School of Bartending **Mixing It Right**

Action School of Bartending & Hospitality
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The classroom looks like a regular bar, but, says owner Kamal Bhatia, the bottles are filled with food color. Here, students learn how to make the perfect margarita; or how to achieve the exact balance of mint and lime for that ideal mojito.

The student manual at Bhatia's recently opened Action School of Bartending is impressive. Over 150 popular cocktail recipes are taught here. A 40-hour course also covers every other aspect of bartending- from setting up bar equipment and glassware, to wine and beer making, to pairing food with wine and cocktails, to customer service skills and responsible alcohol services.

"Students then go through a test after which they receive certification from the Georgia Post-Secondary Education Commission," says Bhatia.

Bhatia, who has a background in hotel management, having worked for the finest hotels in Atlanta like the Ritz Carlton and the Sheraton, saw a huge shortage for trained bartenders, especially in the September to December period.

"This is an extremely busy period for hotels," he says. "I also run a consultancy company called Action Solutions, where we train and place personnel in the hotel industry. We have tie-ups with all the major fine hotels in the Atlanta area. Last year, we found that there is a huge shortage of qualified bartenders at big functions that start in September and last through the end of the year. I used to depend on other agencies to find people of right caliber. That is when I thought of starting my own school of bartending, to meet this growing demand."

Bhatia was initiated into this business by hotel directors because "we provided consistent quality," he says.

Action School of Bartending offers a variety of courses ranging from the 40-hour Master Bartender course to short term courses on bartending for private parties (8 hours), introduction to wines (4 hours) and banquet services (8 hours). The school has also introduced the scaled down version of the Master Bartender course- 20 hours of training that includes 40 of the most popular cocktail recipes.

Certified bartenders can make \$20-\$25 per hour depending on their customer and selling skills.

“We get novices who know nothing about bartending,” says Bhatia. “Once they are trained, we put them on call basis, so that they can get hands on training in a real bar situation. If they are looking for full time jobs, we have a network of restaurants and bars where they will be absorbed. There is always a shortage of bartenders.”

Action School places a premium on teaching students how to communicate with the customer, and also train for job interviews. A section of the school curriculum is devoted to hygiene and sanitation. Students are taught how to clean equipment and glassware at the right temperatures. The course curriculum also includes responsible alcohol services.

“The bartender is liable, if the customer gets involved in an accident, under the influence of alcohol,” says Bhatia. It is the bartender’s job to tell the customer when to stop. He can refuse to serve him more alcohol. He can even call the taxi service or the cops if necessary.”

Bhatia has lofty dreams for his school. He plans to start another location for his school in Buckhead, where he expects more walk-ins. His ultimate goal is to have franchises all over the US.

“In our culture, a “bar” has negative connotations,” says Bhatia. “But I believe that there is nothing wrong with having a drink, as long as you know how to stay within limits.”

For good measure, he adds: “This year’s American Idol, David Cook is a former bartender.”